

NOTES ON THE NIDIFICATION OF THE TORRES STRAITS PIGEON, *MYRISTICIVORA SPILORRHOA*.

By A. J. NORTH, F.L.S.

From the month of October until the end of March the Torres Straits or White Nutmeg Pigeon, during most seasons, is freely dispersed over the dense brushes and mangrove-lined mouths of the rivers of the North-eastern coast of Queensland. Mr. J. A. Boyd, of the Herbert River, has kindly forwarded me the eggs of this species taken on North Barnard Island by Captain Proctor at the latter end of last season, also the accompanying notes kindly communicated by Mr. Wm. T. White, of Greenfield, relative to the nidification of this fine pigeon.

“A few years ago these birds came to the scrubs on the Herbert River in great numbers, generally arriving about the beginning of September and remaining until the end of March, but during the last three or four years they have become very scarce, in fact, I did not see a score altogether last year. The decrease in their numbers is no doubt due to the wholesale slaughter of these poor birds during the breeding season, and, unless this is prevented, the Torres Straits pigeons will entirely disappear from this district within the next four or five years. I have found the eggs of these birds during November and December. The nest is a very rude structure, consisting simply of a few twigs laid across each other in the fork of a horizontal branch generally not more than fifteen or twenty feet from the ground, and so open that the eggs (two in number) are visible from below. The birds appear to prefer mangroves and tea-trees, and do not crowd their nests together, although three or four pairs may sometimes build in the same tree. I have frequently found their nests fully twenty miles inland, but think most of them build very close to the sea.”

Mr. Boyd also informs me that they breed sometimes in the open forest Eucalypti, and that he has obtained very young pigeons miles from the coast. Last year he did not observe any pigeons till after Christmas, but obtained two specimens this season on the 14th of September, and has since seen several small flocks. Mr. Boyd is of opinion that the cause of the pigeons not frequenting the Herbert River district so much as formerly is due to the felling of hundreds of acres of scrub that contained the berry-bearing trees on which they fed.

It is worthy of note that the nests of *Myristicivora spilorrhoea*, found by Captain Proctor, Mr. W. T. White, and the late Mr. John Macgillivray, each contained two eggs for a full sitting, while those found by Gilbert at Port Essington either contained a single egg or a single young bird.

The eggs vary in shape from an ellipse to an elongated oval, are pure white, the texture of the shell being fine, one specimen being lustreless, the other slightly glossy. Length (A) 1.8×1.3 inch; (B) 1.83×1.2 inch.

It may not be out of place to mention here that migratorial birds are in some seasons more abundant in the localities they usually visit than in others, which is not always due to climatic influences or an abundance of food. The Top-knot Pigeons (*Lopholaimus antarcticus*), especially, have been very numerous this season in New South Wales, my attention first being drawn to the fact by the unusually large number of these pigeons that were exposed for sale in the poulterers' shops about Sydney during July and August.

On the 9th of August some notes were contributed to the 'Sydney Mail,' referring to the unusual number of Top-knot Pigeons which were on the brushes at that time in the neighbourhood of Gosford, several of which had made nests and laid their eggs. Mr. W. J. Grime also informs me that "the Top-knot Pigeons were particularly plentiful this season in the neighbourhood of the Tweed River, and that flocks of them, numbering

some thousands, could be seen during September flying round at any time through the day from the mountains to the coast, and back." Mr. Boyd writes, "The Top-knot Pigeons have been very plentiful this season ; they have not been so numerous since 1882."

This season has not been a better one than the last for the berry-bearing trees that provide the food for these pigeons, yet in both colonies has the Top-knot Pigeon been more than usually abundant this year.